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[Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics](#) (2006), 15: 424-428 Cambridge University Press

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doi:10.1017/S0963180106230524

Published online by Cambridge University Press 09Aug2006

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[Issue 04 - Oct 2006](#)

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## Commentary: The Professional Obligation of Physicians in Times of Hazard and Need

**Rosamond Rhodes** <sup>a1</sup>

[Article author query](#)

<sup>a1</sup> Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and The City University of New York [rhodes r](#) [\[PubMed\]](#) [\[Google Scholar\]](#)

Those who read only the introductory section of "Physician Obligation in Disaster Preparedness and Response," the statement from the AMA's Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, apparently an elaboration on CEJA Opinion 3-I-04, E-9.067, will find an expression of laudable professional responsibility in the face of a disaster. There the AMA authors explicitly acknowledge "that unique *responsibilities* beyond planning rest on the shoulders of the medical profession" (emphasis added). They also declare that, "physicians are needed to care for victims. In some instances, this will *require* individual physicians to place their health or their lives at risk" (emphasis added). As the AMA authors note, these responsibilities have been accepted at least since the writing of Thomas Percival in 1803 and endorsed by the AMA in posting their 1847 code. The commitments are also asserted in the preamble of the AMA's most current *Principles of Medical Ethics*, which states that "a physician must recognize *responsibility* to patients, *first and foremost*," and again in Principle VIII, which states that "[a] physician shall, when caring for a patient, regard *responsibility* to the patient as paramount" (emphasis added).

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